Sex and Frogs and rock and roll

IAN DURY: musichall for psychopaths

Ian Dury
Paris

"TOUJOURS LA bête noir!" cried Ian Dury, waving a long pink scarf at the audience. "Hey froggies!" The Parisian audience seemed delighted as Dury put on a cod French accent, swaggered, stuck out his tongue and did obscene things to the microphone. It was the opening night of Ian Dury And The Blockheads' European tour, and he celebrated with a rocking music hall performance.

At times it was musichall for psychopaths, as in 'Mary' when he started licking a flickknife and wiping it across his throat. But even in songs about knifing girls in lonely bus shelters, a raucous good humour prevailed. All this was fine and enjoyable, but it was when he sang 'Wake Up and Make Love to Me', and concentrated all the power on his tender and menacing lyrics that the performance really took flight. Too much face-pulling and pantomime can be a distraction, especially when Ian Dury's battered-survivor personality is so strong in itself.

The Paris New Wave community turned out in force, and the Bataclan theatre was filled with sleek, bright eyed little animals of the night. The French take rock'n' roll very seriously, and they have brought New Wave fashion to a kind of studied perfection, that looks much too elegant to be real. It's the way they hold their cigarettes that gives them away.

The fans obviously appreciated Dury's very English brand of cool but even at the encore, with 'Sex And Drugs And Rock And Roll' you couldn't say they exploded. That's why it came as a surprise when after Dury and The Blockheads had finally left the stage they stamped and shouted for ten minutes to try and bring them back. If that enthusiasm had come earlier, a good concert might have turned into something incadescent.

As for concert violence: one bottle was thrown, without braining anyone, and there was some gobbing. "I thought the French didn't spit?" someone asked Dury afterwards. "Some of them did, but I didn't care" he replied. "I just spat right back at 'em. Wait'll they find out I've got TB — ha hargh!"

MARY HARRON

Krazy Kat
Marquee

IT MUST have been about a year ago when I caught Krazy Kat at the Marquee. At the time they were into a sort of sub-10cc harmony trip and it was certain reservations that I returned for a second glimpse. The optimism was rewarded with a much improved sway in the direction towards a more rock orientated set.

Lineupwise the only visible difference is John Shearer who you can just about see behind all those drums and cymbals, all of which he actually puts to good use. The change in the music is even more noticeable, with a definite leaning towards googie or rather, *Boogie!* Things started off okay and gradually got better, the song 'Salvador Dali' touched on an interesting subject matter and their former Capability Brown number 'Liar' touched more than a few feet.

One of my least favourite KK numbers 'Dundee Calling' is still in the set, but that virtually marked the point from where things got going in the right direction. From that song, rather wimpish methinks and the pale end of pomp rock (run for the hills!) syndrome, they got decidedly heavier with the high-point of the set a real raver 'Don't Let Me Down', total heads down stuff and featuring some hot stuff from guitarist Graham White. From there till the end it was pretty straight ahead rock in the grand old British tradition for which there is presumably still a chance judging by the punters' reaction.

Encore time was fun time with the two lads from north of the border keyboards player Harry McDonald and drummer John 'kilt colt' Shearer providing some jockrock before leaving with 'The Last Time'.

A year ago they seemed to be falling into the City Boy nowhere-land, now they look much stronger. Now there seems more hope if they can make total commitment in the right direction. With some more robust rockers, by this time next year we'll be swimming in a sea of sweat down Wardour Street.

DAVID BROWN

A STRANGLERS SET
GAUGE SELECTION*
Played by *.010" .013" .017" PLAIN .032" .042" .052" WOUND
HUGH CORNWELL
ROTOSOUND
A POWERFUL PERFORMANCE
ROTOSOUND music strings

Johnny G.
Richmond

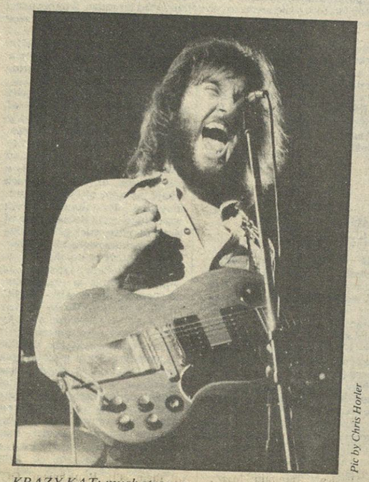
JOHNNY G. is one of those rare performers ably suited to provide you with entertainment, whatever the mood or event. I have seen him sandwiched inappropriately between The Doll and The Lurkers (courtesy of that splendid Beggars Banquet bash of a few weeks back) where despite being a solo act he held his own and indeed almost succeeded in upstaging the bill toppers.

It came as no surprise to me then to find the man in splendid form when I had a night out in Richmond recently. The mood was relaxed and the atmosphere, as you might expect in a pub on Sunday, boozy and good-natured. Johnny G.'s songs (most of which are self-penned) contain not only a genuine sense of humour but also bravado, panache and a definite sense of timing that allows for one or two more pensive, touching moments to creep into his set. Eventually, you begin to understand why it is that he of all people should be attracting so much interest so suddenly, after playing the circuit and doing the rounds for several years now.

'Golden Years', his soon to be released single (and not the Bowie song of the same name) displays a more thoughtful direction in his material than is usually witnessed on the live platform. The high, strong vocals are casually surrounded by sparse guitar arrangements which in turn are juiced up a little by the added backing of a drum machine and harp. Johnny G. is far beyond anybody's idea of a one man band though. On record he utilises a full backing band which doesn't accompany him on live dates. That's the way it's always been for him and that's the way it always works for him as well, compensating for the lack of instrumentation with his own brand of working class charm. And if you think that sound *patronising* then you can't have been paying attention to what it is I'm saying, bub. Johnny G. is a distinctive performer. A multi-faceted musical enigma, OK?

Unsurprisingly, it's the old faves that go down the best tonight: 'Chinese Water Torture', 'Hippy Graveyard' and of course 'Call Me Bwana'. The Sunday regulars respond enthusiastically enough and by the time last orders are called the performance has been pretty much of a success all round. The shouts and cries for more were met by John's tongue in cheek retort, "This ain't the Marquee you know . . ."

MICK WALL



KRAZY KAT: much stronger

Pic by Chris Horler

Tyla Gang
Bristol

I STILL can't figure what a straight rock 'n' roll band like The Tyla Gang are doing on Beserkley on the first place — like Stiff, Beserkley seems to be a brotherhood of kindred spirits and Sean Tyla don't look like no acid casualty to me.

Ah, but he may be a victim! Of what? Well, time I suppose, because if you really wanted to do a hatchet job, you would call Sean and his band a re-tread of practically every 'hit em hard, keep 'em low' outfit from the Stones to Quo. Devastatingly original they ain't.

Still, my foot is tapping, so I must be having a good time. So is the audience — very good, but then the Tyla Gang are the support for tonight, but bases are loaded.

Beret and beard, guitar and throaty voice is Sean Tyla, taking on the vocals. Powerful if undistinguished, he does a fine job on the likes of 'It's High Time', a moody number — heavy on bass and drums, it builds kinda Joe Walshish, but better. They operate mainly on the ramma lamma level though with some sharp playing from the lead on 'It's Gonna Rain'. The next one sounded too much like the Stones for my comfort, and 'Standing In The Middle Of A Hurricane' was pretty much as the title suggests. There's lots of skilful soloing and they finished off with 'They're Gonna Take Me Away' which was naturally frantic. Yes, they warmed up this lot alright.

I found them enjoyable if unoriginal. But I'm sure there's plenty of you who are gonna like them a lot more than me.

RAB

The Rubettes
Warwick

STEALTHILY, the Rubettes are playing their first British gigs for nearly two years. Without any fuss because they're keen to test the temperature before embarking on a full-scale tour following the release of their new album next month.

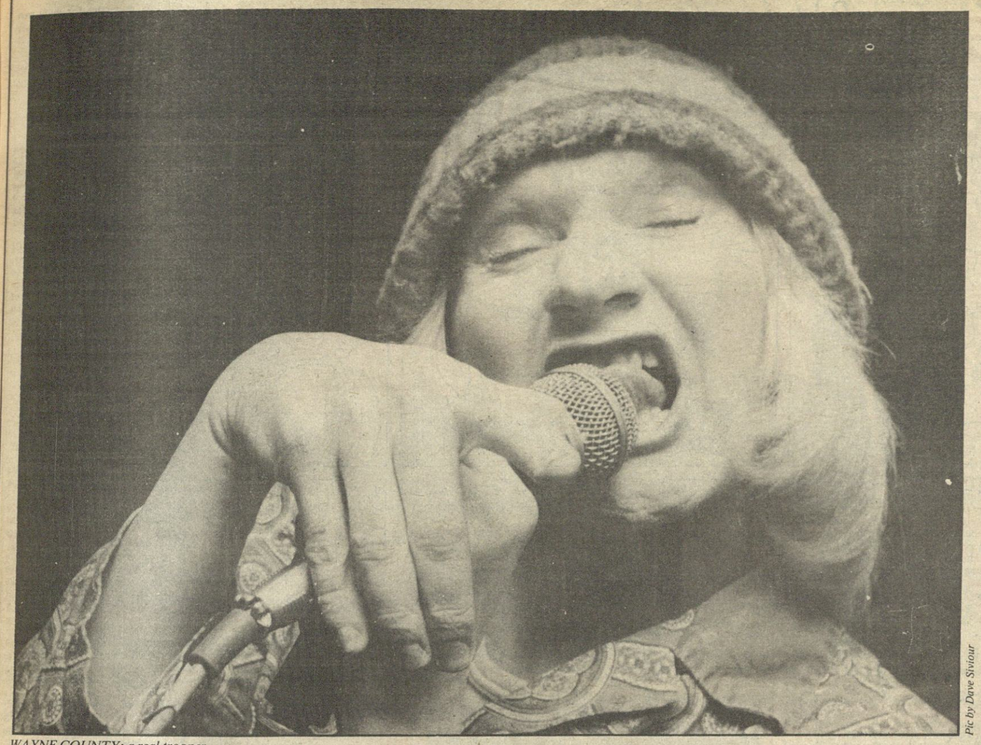
On the evidence of their reception at Warwick University, they're perhaps being a little over-cautious about their earlier teenybopper reputation. The students lapped up their 'Greatest Hits' with surprising eagerness although the band themselves drew the line at 'Sugar Baby Love'. "Oh no, that was Mud", lied drummer John Richardson through his teeth (undoubtedly his sharpest joke of the evening) but I got the feeling that the audience would have loved it. Certainly they now display a skill that was hidden beneath those ridiculous white hats they used to wear but shyly in evidence when my kid sister frogmarched me along to a gig of theirs back in their 'Top Of The Pops' heyday.

But their hits are obviously part of today's students' heritage and they play them well. The new material from the forthcoming album reveals more of a West Coast influence, utilising their developed sense of harmonies and love of country rock but such is the prevailing fashion that the older stuff often sounded more on the ball.

They've got a good set together, though, and the inter-song patter is an invaluable aid to creating a rapport with the audience. And they'll take it further when Richardson drops his camp mannerisms which are particularly unamusing in this, the year of the Tom Robinson Band.

Between the old and the new there's a country interlude when guitarists Tony Thorpe and an as-yet unannounced session player get together to play some Chet Atkins and 'Duelling Banjos' by Eric Weisberg. And they got everyone on their feet at the end with a lengthy rock and roll medley which was a bit slow in tempo for me but seemed to suit the audience fine. If you can please students you're well in with a chance.

HUGH FIELDER



WAYNE COUNTY: a real trooper

Pic by Dave Sivieur

A beautiful loser, out of control

Wayne County And The Electric Chairs
Leeds

THE FACT that Wayne's still clubbing it around England is an indication in itself that his heart's in the right place. Alright, he probably doesn't have all that much choice in determining the 'importance' of his venues, or the way he keeps the wolf away from the door, but guys like County always give more than they take; from here on in it's his kind of crazy integrity that provides the driving force. Like all beautiful losers, he's doing this because he 'can't do anything else so well'.

His one-time glorious image has taken some weathering, his only visual gesture toward outrage now is the eye make-up. the rest is dowdily concealed under Oxfam clothes, what looks like a long blue night-shirt, a green and pink woollen cap, a pair of baggy pants and girly slippers. He's styleless and messy, and the healthy decadence of his songs is reflected (the wrong way) in his image. A real trooper, but has he let himself go!

Is there logic behind this? Applying a full facial is probably harder work than writing your next rock 'n' roll excursion; has he cut the frills for the sake of the art? Being an old hand playing an Anglified ball-game — there's a lot of English punk music and action in this set — time's precious for Wayne, and he knows it.

Like a man who knows this tour could be his last shot at a commercial killing, Wayne kept the music coming at a hell for leather breakneck pace, only pausing between numbers to show that he was pausing between numbers. The older material was the best; 'You Make Me Cream In My Jeans', the Illegal cut 'Stuck On You' and the '25,000 seller' 'Fuck Off' all had healthier feels, motoring, loose and with riffs more identifiable (even if you were hearing them for the first time).

The new material from the 'Electric Chairs' album was generally claustrophobic and unmemorable, but whether that was because the songs were newies or because — this being only the second date of the tour — the band weren't likely to peak for quite a while yet, I don't know. 'Eddie And Sheena' for example, was catchy but disordered; County only retrieved the number's credibility as a cute culture clash commentary with some inspired inter-stanza (very Chaplin) silent movie miming.

But the theatrical highlight of the evening came by accident when the guitarists (Greg Van Cook and Henry Padovani) got their signals crossed over the intro to 'Rock And Roll Cleopatra', each one playing out of time and key. Wayne explained, reprimanding them bluntly but declining to acknowledge that unprofessional conduct was involved: "Look. We got the one song called 'Rock And Roll Resurrection' and another called 'Rock And Roll Cleopatra'. This is the Egyptian one. C'mon!"

Wayne observed: "You like the faster numbers better, then?" and he proceeded to fulfil his promise. He's a good reader of his audience even though he's reading the obvious. He came to go down well and to give the people a good time, giving total value for money, though never refraining ('plug, plug, plug') from reminding the responsive audience that the number we were hearing was 'off a the album', and that's where the sauerkraut's hibernating. Hence, the faster number — 'Rock And Roll Resurrection'.

The encore was 'Out Of Control', and Wayne showed how to get that way. By the song's climax, he'd totally flipped out, well and truly over the top, losing his cap (did we see something we shouldna?) thrashing his limbs against everything in sight, and ultimately shoving his head inside of J.J. Johnson's sorrily expendable bass drum during the final roll.

County has very definitely (and inevitably) been influenced a lot by his exuberant transatlantic successors. He's lived through, and among, our own 'movement', but as a pioneer of the American theatrical version, the homage he pays us is unnecessary and unwise.

Ironically, he looked and sounded most at home sharing lyrics on the final number, 'Evil Minded Mama', with hep cat Levi Dexter, frontman with rockabilly support act, the Rockats. He's got roots problems alright, but so long as he pulls through this transitional incestuous phase and remembers just how important he still is, maybe his reward won't only be in heaven.

DES MOINES

Dickey Betts
Rainbow

THE SPIRIT of 1967 lives on, man. Like, *BOOOGIEE!* Or at least that's what I've heard it's all about anyway.

Hmmm . . . Dickey Betts, as older readers will no doubt recall, was an integral part of that erstwhile bunch of good-time Southern mothers, The Allman Brothers Band. My, how times have changed, eh what?

The Dickey Betts Band remain as little more then than a slightly embarrassing artefact of an American youth/drug culture that has long since outlived its relevance and importance in modern times.

However, Dickey Betts can still attract a large enough gathering to fill the Rainbow, but for how long will this continue? Denim clad fanatics besieged the Rainbow, lapping up a set loaded up to here with musical platitudes and lyrical cliches. You got the unsettling feeling that everybody involved (band and audience alike) were going strictly through the motions.

Dan Toler (guitar/vocals), Michael Workman (keyboard/vocals), Don Sharbono (drums), David Toler (drums) and David Goalflies (bass) are backing musicians who ably provide the necessary. Dicky Betts himself though, is the *man*. Fronting the stage, legs astride and looking hysterically like a smaller version of Marshall Sam McCloud in wide brimmed ten gallon hat. His singing is weak and undistinguished; his slide guitar playing is neat, concise but not featured often enough; his lead work, apart from bridging one or two gaps in the structure the melody suffers from (a) the atrocious quality of the sound and (b) the self indulgent nature of his insipid doodlings and meanderings to the point of blowing out the basic-to-good rhythms and grooves his band creates so deftly.

His repertoire includes some old faves from the more productive days of the Allmans like 'Jessica', 'Ramblin' Man', 'Back On The Road Again' and 'Good Time Feeling', interspersed with renditions of the newer material scheduled for his soon to be released album 'Atlanta's Burning Down'.

I suppose that you just can't teach an old dog new tricks. More's the pity.

MICK WALL

Punishment Of Luxury
Newcastle

THIS IS an emergency. Police, the local councils, students and hell-bent droogs who throw glasses have been laying siege to rock in the North-East. And yet at the same time the sulphuric atmosphere seems to be feeding an acrid combustion of dangerous new bands. So we can and must fight back.

The other night at a live gig in the tiny Spectro recording studio (SRO at 60) I saw maybe the best of them all: Punishment Of Luxury. They had previously been in front of an audience about half a dozen times and they played one of the most commanding sets I have ever heard. This is a band you actually *need* to hear to have a proper perspective on how far '78 will travel.

Punishment Of Luxury's music is crafted like a silver sledgehammer: brilliant, a frivolous toy, a murder weapon. They combine speed, weight, intensity, presence and coherent intelligence at a level unmatched in my memory except perhaps by Lou Reed when he last played Newcastle. (Ridiculous ravings about a local band? I know I'm burdening them but this is urgent, take it from the ancient mariner.)

'Puppet Life' was their first and their last, a likely single soon, their definitive song so far. Guitarists Nevilluxury and Malla Kaballa and bassist Jimmy Giro hit a riff like a ballet for giants. Vocalist Brian Bond stalked on utterly weird in what looked like cast-offs from 'Richard III', jerked about and sang with rivetting rage and power. I wanted to punch the walls down, stamp holes in the floor and take a flying header through the ceiling, break down all limiting factors: the sound of total liberation, that could be it.

And gradually their words began to shape and direct the excitement by provocation, challenge and irony. For 'Pouf' Bond became the vicious voice of the self-styled 'silent majority' who only feel safe in conformity and cry 'Pouf!' whenever they are confronted with something different — punks, hippies, students, gays, musicians. He snarled "You think it's clever to be different/But I have to struggle the normal way". He storms around the audience demanding their support: "Pouf! We hate 'em. Do what you're told. Anyone who doesn't shout 'Pouf!' is a pouf!".

They spilled the bitter-funny approach to the 'social outcast' over into farce later on with 'Jellyfish' in which Bond speaks for that unloved creature: 'Most people when they see me are replused/When I sting you for days you'll be convulsed.' The words are whimsical, the music is pulverising. Other hot ones I'll elaborate on when they become famous next week are 'Brain Bomb', 'Elvis Costello Is Dead', 'Let's Get Married' ('We both think the same/It's you and me against the Russians'), and 'You're So Beautiful'.

They rake the scum off your mind, cauterise hatred and obsession.

So in one sense it is appropriate thast, theatrically, the climax of their show is 'Obsession'. But the song is very different from the rest. The melody is of almost McCartneyish prettiness in contrast to their usual typhoon of sound. The subject is a man in a long raincoat who tells us he's not perverted, it's just that he's shy: 'With my park-bench eye/I see them all go by.' Again their target is society's frightened and frightening rejection of the oddball but this time they express it through *grand guignol*, an elaborate and disturbing mime: a rape (of a shop window dummy which falls to bits in the 'struggle') and then castration by a vigilante with a butcher's knife (blood and bollocks everywhere). Bond is an experienced actor and he managed to keep it just on the right side of gross though it's a risky venture.

But I wouldn't want to instill any doubts. Punishment Of Luxury are extraordinary. Sour rock? The band motto is 'All change'. For freedom that is . . .

PHIL SUTCLIFFE

David Coverdale's Whitesnake
Scarborough

THE FIRST thing you notice as the band squeezes on to the small stage at Scarborough Penthouse is that David Coverdale still *projects*. Much, much larger than life, it's like he's making his comeback in a 100,000 capacity astrodome rather than in a sweaty, sleazy little club (where long hair, denim and flares still hold sway) in a town on the Yorkshire coast.

Consequently, his stage personality is overwhelming, his charisma is immense . . . and you get the feeling that you're witnessing the beginning of something just a little bit special.

David Coverdale's Whitesnake are still a young, inexperienced outfit, but the potential is there, everywhere you look. Mick Moody and Bernie Marsden convince totally in their roles as twin guitarists; Neil Murray, away from the complex confines of Colosseum II and National Health ("At last I'm playing with my heart, not my head"), is a joy to watch on bass, his spread-fingered hand speeding up and down the instrument's neck like a scuttling spider; one-time Streetwalker David Dowell impresses on drums; and keyboardist Brian Johnston plays a Jon Lord role with style and panache, even though he's hardly been in the band long enough to catch his breath.

And Coverdale . . . well, I'd almost forgotten what a dynamic singer and performer he is.

Unlike his 'Northwinds' album (reviewed elsewhere in the paper), tonight we were treated to a whole host of uptempo numbers, Purple songs 'Lady Luck' (introduced solemnly as "A song that Tommy and me wrote"), 'Mistreated' and 'Lady Double Dealer' amongst them. Indeed, the version of 'Mistreated' (and here's where I incur the wrath of thousands of readers) was far superior to the Ritchie Blackmore's Rainbow rendition. *Believe* me.

Other tunes included 'Only My Soul' and 'Breakdown' (both off the new LP), Bobby Bland's 'Ain't No Love In The Heart Of The City', an off-the-cuff blues-breaking boogie instrumental entitled 'Breathalyser', an improvisation for the second encore that included snatches of 'Rock Me Baby' and 'You Shook Me'...

It was a short set (at the moment, Whitesnake don't know many songs), rough and ragged at times (due both to malfunctioning monitors and lack of rehearsal) . . . but even if they'd only played *one* song, the inherent greatness of David Coverdale's new outfit couldn't possibly have gone by unnoticed.

Go see 'em and you'll just have to agree. No doubt about it.

GEOFF BARTON